

Difficulties in the Vienna Talks

Why in news?

The talks in Vienna to revive the nuclear agreement (JCPOA) with Iran entered the last stage at the end of February.

What is the history behind the Iran Nuclear Deal?

- Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or Iran nuclear deal) is the result of negotiations between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, UK, USA and EU) Nations.
- It was quietly brokered by Oman in an attempt to repair its mistrust with Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- **Objective-** The deal obliged Iran to limit its uranium enrichment programme which will be verified by an intrusive inspection regime.
- In return, US agreed to partially lift its economic sanctions on Iran.
- However this was not ratified in US Senate and was implemented through periodic executive orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- Later, Trump administration pulled out from the deal in May 2018 and exerted maximum pressure on Iran to renegotiate through its sanctions.

What are the details about the talks?

- The aim of the talks is to produce a road map for the revival of the JCPOA by addressing two critical issues — Iran's nuclear enhanced programme and American sanctions.
- **Stand of the U.S.** - The U.S. wants Iran to end its uranium enrichment and centrifuge development programmes and return to the 2015 agreement.
- It has ended the U.S.'s support for Saudi Arabia's war against the Houthis- Iran backed militants in Yemen and promised to lift sanctions if Iran returns to JCPOA terms.
- It also made an offer to Iran to release 1 billion dollar of Iranian money frozen in South Korea as part of the sanctions in exchange for ending its 20% uranium enrichment.
- **Iran's demand-** But Iran has demanded the U.S. lift all sanctions imposed by erstwhile President which is still in enforcement.

What are the effects of the war in Ukraine over the Vienna talks?

- As per the JCPOA provisions, Iran was required to export its excess enriched uranium to Russia while Russia would help Iran to downgrade its Fordow enrichment plant into an isotope manufacturing centre.
- Relaxing the sanctions on Iranian oil exports would bring down the soaring oil prices, thus moderating the impact of the U.S.'s own sanctions on Russian oil exports.
- It was said that the Russians were deliberately trying to delay the finalisation of the agreement to prevent the U.S.

- Russia had received written guarantees from the U.S. affirming that Russia's role in the implementation of the JCPOA would not be affected.
- The dialogue was back on track, however, no agreement has materialised so far.
- The deal-breaker at present is just the removal of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO).
- The principal reason why this has remained unresolved so far lies in U.S. domestic politics.
 - Polarisation of the U.S.
 - Backup of Israel
 - Failure of Biden's domestic agenda due to opposition from within his own party

How about the situation in the region?

- There is no indication as yet that the JCPOA will be finalised.
- **U.S's situation**- Mr. Biden faces challenges at home from the opposition and is anxious about the November elections.
- The U.S. has lost much of its credibility as a security provider in the region, aggravated by signals of disengagement from West Asian affairs from the Biden administration.
- **Iran's position**- The JCPOA carries much less significance for Iran now than it did in 2015 as Iran has mastered the nuclear enrichment cycle and is capable of defending its technological achievements.
- Iran has survived the economic hardships and its prospects of national rejuvenation are already apparent with the IMF's GDP growth projection to be 2% in 2022.
- Iran's problems with the U.S. are not based on technical issues pertaining to uranium enrichment; they were political and relate to its domestic order and regional role.
- **Diversifying the partners**- Iran has now moved on, with deepening ties with Russia and China, and robust engagements — political, economic, military and logistical with regional partners.
- Iran is rebuilding relations with Azerbaijan, is a partner with Turkey in Syria, and has had four rounds of dialogue with Saudi Arabia.
- **Israel-Iran hostility**- Israel remains firmly opposed to the nuclear deal and continues to attack Iranian assets in Syria, Iraq and even Iran itself.
- **Ukraine crisis**- Not one West Asian country, besides Kuwait, has condemned Russia over the Ukraine conflict or imposed sanctions on it.

Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/the-jcpoa-continues-to-be-elusive/article65268999.ece>